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A specified four or five pages to "look over" are designated and the contestants are given the room for an hour. At the end of the hour, they are asked to appear, one by one, and read before judges a page from the material assigned. Marking on a percentage basis, the judges select the five highest of each class to appear in the final contest. The final contest is held upon the afternoon or evening of the same day as the semi-final. It is held before the entire school and is practically as impromptu as the one preceding. To make it of interest, and not mere hodge-podge, it is necessary to have the matter which is read a single unit. It must, of course, be divided into ten approximately equal parts and assigned immediately after the semi-final. As in the earlier contest, it should be something within the experience of the readers and is much better if of interest to the audience. "Rip Van Winkle" has the desired qualities, and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," can, with a little judicious cutting, be made excellent material for this use. The final contest will work most smoothly if, after a general announcement, the speakers read, classes alternating, with no individual introductions to break the story. The judges, marking again on a percentage basis, indicate the *individual* who ranks highest, and, by comparing the aggregate marks, the class whose *team* has won is determined.

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## BOOKS THE UNDERGRADUATE SHOULD KNOW

### A LIST OF "FIFTY BEST BOOKS"

On a recent June morning, while we were chatting in the bachelor apartments of three Harvard graduates who were continuing their technical studies in the graduate school of their Alma Mater, one of them turned to me, as I was replacing a volume of Pater on the shelf, with the request that if I ever made out a list of books that "a fellow ought to read," I should be sure to send him the list. I have now made out such a list and while sending it to him I have concluded to give others the opportunity to see it and possibly welcome its suggestions.

Of course, one might suppose that a college graduate would know what to read, but in these days when the greater part of a college schedule consists of subjects like pomology and the dairy industry, interspersed with electrical engineering and veterinary surgery, why should a college graduate know what to read? My young friend had specialized in architecture for five years, and consequently, I imagine, when he found

himself at a modern Boston tea party tête-a-tête with a vivacious and attractive Radcliffe girl, he felt the paltriness of technical lore and the value of mere literature.

Anyone who aspires to general culture should know the books on my short list. I hesitate to call the list, "The Fifty Best Books," because there are no fifty best books. Yet such a title has its advantages, as it serves as a challenge, a provocative. But the list is not for the professional critic, nor for the "old reader." It is primarily for the high-school student, for the college undergraduate who needs guidance. Besides, I believe there are thousands of young men and women who have never gone to college who will welcome a suggestion such as I am now making. Since I began this article I have received a request from the far-off Pacific coast from friends who are sojourning there in quest of health. "We have plenty of leisure," so runs the letter, "and we have been reading the current fiction until we are tired of it. Can you send us a list of the best things? We inquired of the public library for such a list, but we could not get one."

That request comes from a man and a woman who are past two score in years. They have never taken a college course. I wish I had frequent requests from college students whom I teach year after year. No one knows better than the teacher of literature the lack of literary culture among our present generation of college students. The cry goes forth that a generation or more ago when there were no teachers of English composition, no teachers of literature, there was more literary atmosphere in college halls than today when our greater universities have twenty-five or more teachers giving instruction in English. In this discussion it is usually forgotten that at present all classes and conditions are in college studying all classes and conditions of subjects, while years ago the students who were studying the Latin and Greek classics came from families whose reading covered a wider field than the "yellow journal." For my part, I should be willing to dispense with all instruction in English, both in rhetoric and in literature, if in its stead I could have the assurance that each student during his four years of college life would give thirty minutes a day to the unhurried reading of my fifty books. That would give him fifteen hours to each book. Some of them, like the *Bible*, *Shakespeare*, and *The Divine Comedy*, might require more than fifteen hours, but others would take fewer. It's a slow reader who cannot read the *Rubaiyat* in an hour.

My list is a short one; it were an easy matter to add fifty more. While it is largely based on individual preference, that preference has

been influenced by the judgment of the literary critics of the past. It is just such a list as I now wish someone had handed to me when I, a boy of sixteen, was reading omnivorously and continuously. Great works of science like Darwin's *Origin of Species* and histories like Green's *Short History of the English People* are not included, because I have in mind pure literature, not histories and scientific works. My list is largely made up of fiction and poetry, because fiction and poetry make up the greater part of literature. The editor of one of our oldest and most literary magazines writes of a list that I submitted for his criticism: "I notice that you have included a number of novels. These I started to strike out, but you are well within your rights in maintaining that a certain proportion of fiction—not too large—forms an integral portion of your scheme." "Rather archaic," was the curt comment of an amiable youth just out of college, when I showed him the list. He wanted me to put in Arnold Bennett, and Bernard Shaw, and Singe. Then I quoted the inscription that I once read on the walls of the dome of the National Gallery in London: "The works of those who have stood the test of ages have a claim to that respect and veneration to which no modern can pretend."

It will be noticed that the fifty titles represent fifty different authors. I do not mean to say that one should read but one book by Hawthorne, and Balzac, and Tolstoy, and Dickens, and Scott, and Thackeray, and Carlyle, and Browning. But I do say that the general reader ought to read one at least, and I have selected the one he ought to read. The appetite grows by what it feeds on. How can anyone, especially if about sixteen years of age, finish *Ivanhoe* without taking up *The Talisman* or *Rob Roy*?

I know it is a parlous feat to rush into print with such a list as I have made. We have not forgotten the criticism the famous ex-president of an old university received a few years ago when he published his list. One of the most charitable critics of his list wrote: "We cannot deny that the list as presented seems to us most mysteriously made up"; while a more hostile critic said that the list contained a hodge-podge of material much of which was chosen by caprice; that the intellectuality of one who based his reading on that list would be as striped as a zebra. I cannot hope that my list will attract such fire from the critic. In the first place, the light that beats upon my throne is of such low candle-power that not even is "darkness visible"; and in the second place, I fear my list is not sufficiently bizarre to arouse the ire of the critic. Let me forestall some criticism by saying that in a few weeks I should likely

change the list myself, but I doubt that I should revise it according to the notion of any one particular critic.

I have said that the list is one of personal preference, but this statement needs qualification. To avoid too much of the personal equation I sent my original list to a number of editors of newspapers and magazines, and to professors of literature in some of our universities. I asked them to strike out ten titles and to substitute what they considered ten better ones. I have before me now about twenty replies from men whose opinion I value. These replies have led me to make fourteen changes on my original list. I refrain from naming the men because it would not be fair to them to credit or charge them with the responsibility of the fifty titles.

"I have been glad to see your list and I think it is an excellent one," writes a professor of literature from one of our large universities in the West. Such an answer, of course, pleased me, but I must confess to just as much pleasure in the brief note sent by the busy editor of one of our prominent weekly magazines: "A selection like that of the fifty best books is necessarily a matter of personal preference and in such a case surely the opinion of a college professor is superior to that of a mere editor." In view of the awe in which we college professors regard the editors of literary magazines, this is delicious irony. A more distinguished literary editor and critic than the last quoted writes not in irony but in modesty that ought to rebuke my temerity: "Your list of what you call 'Fifty Best Books' is interesting to me as I run over the titles, but I confess I have no classification of literature which would enable me to offer an amendment."

A distinguished man who ranks high as a poet and critic, and who at one time served from a professor's chair, writes understandingly: "Your list is a practical one for the purpose you have in view. I could easily sacrifice Franklin, Thoreau, and Boswell; but I refrain." In similar spirit writes another who is both author and professor: "It seems to me on the whole as satisfactory as such a list could be expected to be." These men have caught the meaning of my list. It is not for literary experts, nor have I attempted a list of books that are a compendium of the wisdom of the ages. When a man whose critical essays on English literature I have read with the greatest respect and admiration tells me that he has no classification of literature that enables him to offer an amendment to my list, I know I ought to be humbled. But I have a feeling that he cannot know, as does the teacher, the need of the high-school and college student for guidance in his reading.

Although there are eleven titles from American literature I do not mean to imply that American literature deserves that much space in a short list. I mean that it deserves that much space for the American reader. By the insertion of the *Golden Treasury* I have been enabled to include the lyrics and songs of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Gray, Keats, and Burns in a single book.

## THE FIFTY BOOKS

*Foreign—*

The Arabian Nights  
 Plutarch's Lives  
 Don Quixote  
 Les Misérables  
 Aeschylus (2 Plays)  
 Sophocles (2 Plays)  
 Plato's Apology and the Phaedo  
 The Divine Comedy  
 The Iliad  
 Faust  
 The Bible  
 The Rubaiyat  
 Molière (2 Plays)  
 Balzac's Père Goriot  
 Anna Karenina

*American—*

Longfellow's Poems  
 Franklin's Autobiography  
 The Sketch Book  
 The Last of the Mohicans  
 Lincoln's Speeches and Writings  
 (Selections)  
 Huckleberry Finn  
 Walt Whitman  
 Poe's Tales and Poems  
 Thoreau's Walden  
 Emerson's Essays  
 The Scarlet Letter

*British—*

The Prologue—Chaucer  
 The Fairie Queene  
 Shakespeare  
 Paradise Lost  
 Pilgrim's Progress  
 Gulliver's Travels  
 David Copperfield  
 Robinson Crusoe  
 Ivanhoe  
 Confessions of an English Opium  
 Eater  
 Tom Jones  
 Vicar of Wakefield  
 Sartor Resartus  
 Essays of Elia  
 Pippa Passes  
 Palgrave's Golden Treasury  
 Vanity Fair  
 Boswell's Johnson  
 Adam Bede  
 Ordeal of Richard Feverel  
 In Memoriam and the Idylls  
 Shelley's Prometheus Unbound  
 Byron's Childe Harold  
 The Jungle Book and Plain Tales

EDWIN WATTS CHUBB

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